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BILLY WHISKERS

By FRANCES MONTGOMERY

The dirigible was being tossed by the storm and the chums were not enjoying it very much. Poor Billy went slipping head foremost from one end of the saloon to the other, sometimes sitting on his tail, at others rolling over and over until he felt like a jellyfish. But still the storm continued, and he could not find a place of safety.

As for Button, he had the best of it, for when the balloon rolled or dove he simply dug his claws further into the curtain pole and hung on for dear life. Once the dirigible sailed for hundreds of feet upside down. Button simply dug in deeper and hung upside down too.

The jerking of the dirigible knocked Stubby off the window seat, and for many minutes he had been rolling from one end of the saloon to the other on one side of the table, while Billy took the same journeys on the other side of the table, only it was not hurting Stubby so much as it was Billy. He had curled himself into a tight ball which made him roll easily. He looked like a ball of scraggly worsted. As for Billy, try as he would he could not curl up in a tight ball, as his legs were too long and his horns much too sharp. "Oh, my, will this storm ever be over? Why did we ever let our curiosity get the better of us and take us to try a ride in this dangerous thing? No more dirigibles for me if I live to get out of this one, which I am very much afraid I won't!"

In less than five minutes from the time Billy spoke the dirigible had weathered the storm and was flying in clear blue sky a thousand feet above the still raging storm. They could still hear the thunder and see the vivid flashes of lightning.

"Gee! What a place to see the moon and stars," thought Billy. "Now the danger seems to be over, I wish we would stay up here until dark so I could see what the moon and the stars look like when we are so near them. If we get near enough to the moon, I should like to jump off and make a visit there."

Poor stupid Billy! He knew nothing of the thousands and thousands of miles between him and the moon, though it might look so very near.

When the dirigible was sailing quietly along, a waiter came in and began setting the table. He did

not see our friends, and went whistling about his task. What most aroused the chums' curiosity were the funny little fences he fastened on the table. Then when everything was ready he sprinkled water on the tablecloth until it was quite wet.

"What in the world is he wetting that perfectly clean cloth for? I should like to know that," mused Billy. "I'll just watch and see."

Fixes Plates
Then before the waiter put down his sprinkling can, he took a plate and set it on the cloth to see if it was wet enough to keep the plate from slipping if the dirigible tipped or rolled to one side. Finding it was wet enough, he left the saloon and came back with a tray of goblets. These he fitted in holes made for them in the table, and then ran around the whole table.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Billy. "Did you ever see anything as slick as that? Now the people won't have their plates or goblets slip into their laps as they eat. I wonder who ever thought of this scheme first. I should like to see how the kitchen looks. It must be as tidy as those on the Pullman cars. And I bet they have some new-fangled contraptions to keep the boilers of hot stuff and the frying pans from slipping on the stove. I'll just go and try to get a peek at it but I'm afraid of being discovered and thrown overboard."

At this moment the waiter returned with a tray of spoons, knives and forks. As the swinging door closed behind him, he found himself facing a rolling ball of string coming straight toward him. As it reached his feet he stepped to one side and the ball hit the door with such force that it flew open and the ball of string rolled through.

The waiter was so astonished that he braced himself against the partition while trying to catch his breath. As he stood there staring he happened to glance up, and there clinging to the curtain pole he saw a big black cat, staring him at him with wide open yellow eyes. This was too much for that waiter. He dropped the tray of silver and fled to the kitchen, but as the swinging door flew open to let him through, he bumped into the cook, who was in turn fleeing from a ball of string or worsted that was rolling around his kitchen floor, giving forth yelps like a dog. The two men clung to each other,

through, he bounded through the hole as a rubber ball might, and went bounding down the long narrow passage until he came up against a wall in a dark closet, as he supposed. But in reality he had rolled through an open door into the stateroom of the officer, who had fled from Button and Billy, and had Stubby only known it, at that very moment he was under the berth.

Soares Officer
At this moment Billy decided to come out and go through the door the officer was holding open.

When the officer saw a big white goat rising from under the table he was so frightened that his legs shook together and he pulled the door shut. By this time Billy was going too fast to slow down, so when his head hit the door he simply went through it as if it had been made of paper.

The noise of the splintering door brought the officer to his senses, and he called for help, but no one heard him. He was about to go to see where everybody was when the swinging door to the kitchen flew open and in rolled a yelping ball of string. At the same moment he spied Button staring down at him. He simply turned and fled to his berth, where he covered up his head so he could not see things, for he was fully convinced he was seeing things not of flesh and blood.

When Stubby in his mad rolling came to the door Billy had butted

through, he bounded through the hole as a rubber ball might, and went bounding down the long narrow passage until he came up against a wall in a dark closet, as he supposed. But in reality he had rolled through an open door into the stateroom of the officer, who had fled from Button and Billy, and had Stubby only known it, at that very moment he was under the berth.

While all this had been taking place the dirigible was fast descending toward its home hangar, and in a few minutes they would be down to the earth again. And it was a good thing for the chums that they were, for when Billy was discovered by the Captain he ordered him thrown overboard with the dog and cat. But if you think it an easy matter to catch as big and strong a goat as Billy, with the fighting propensities he had, and two lively animals like Stubby and Button, you are badly mistaken.

Two or three aviators tried to corner him and tie him up so they could pitch him overboard, but he butted and kicked so they could not lay hands on him. No more hands could be spared from the crew to help, as it required all the rest to manage the ship. Stubby and Button also put up a stiff fight as the men chased them all over the dirigible, from under chairs and tables in this stateroom and that, where they upset things generally as the aviators tried to hit them with brooms, mops, and whatever came handy.

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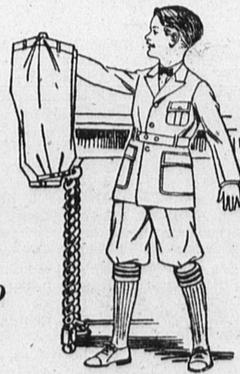
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